DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 743 HE 032 629

AUTHOR	Fordon, Ann E.
TITLE	Advocates, Barriers, and Responses: The Personal Narratives of Nine Female Doctoral Students.
PUB DATE	1999-11-00
NOTE	22p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; Discourse Analysis; *Doctoral Programs; *Educational Discrimination; Educational Opportunities; *Graduate Study; Higher Education; Interviews; Nondiscriminatory Education; *Personal Narratives; *Sex Bias; Sex Discrimination; Sex Stereotypes; *Womens Education

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study provides a detailed account of the experiences of nine female doctoral students through an analysis of their personal narratives. The nine students, attending two large Midwestern public universities, volunteered to share personal narratives; all were working toward doctorates in various fields and were at various stages in their programs. The women spoke at length about educational barriers they faced (those of culture, status, and gender), and their responses to these barriers; but they also acknowledged the support received from educational advocates (friends, colleagues, family members, and teachers) who recognized and encouraged their academic abilities. Cultural barriers occurred when the belief system or practices of a country or institution limited the women's education and professional pursuits; status barriers occurred when an individual with a recognized higher status interfered with a woman's educational pursuit; six of the women also reported negative gender experiences. The women's responses to these barriers included: resistance, expressed by avoidance, confrontation, and/or perseverance; creating supportive collegial environments; participating in departmental activities; and stressing the importance of education to their own students as a way of re-creating support they had received from their advocates. In conclusion, the paper asks whether existing barriers for women seeking academic careers can be identified and eliminated. (Contains 22 references.) (CH)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

HE

1

ED 438 743

ADVOCATES, BARRIERS, AND RESPONSES: THE PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF NINE FEMALE DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Ann E. Fordon
November, 1999

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A FORDON

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

2

HE 032 629

ADVOCATES, BARRIERS, AND RESPONSES:
THE PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF NINE FEMALE DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Abstract

This qualitative study provides a detailed account of the experiences of nine female doctoral students through an analysis of their personal narratives. Although these women did have advocates who supported their initial educational efforts, they encountered many barriers and consequently did not feel supported in their doctoral programs.

ADVOCATES, BARRIERS, AND RESPONSES:
THE PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF NINE FEMALE DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Although increasing numbers of women are earning doctoral degrees—up from 33% in 1983 (Rosenberg, 1988) to 45% in 1996 (Magner, 1997)—little is known about their experiences during doctoral study. Previous research has described only the general experiences of doctoral students (for example, Baird, 1992; Deegan and Hill, 1991; Katz and Hartnett, 1976; Peters and Peterson, 1987; Valdez, 1982; Wright and Lodwick, 1989). Even less is known about the experiences of female doctoral students (with the exception of Dublon, 1983; Holmstrom and Holmstrom, 1974; Madrey, 1983; Prince, 1991; Stryker, Twohey, and Halderson, 1985; Vartuli, 1982). The intent of this study is to provide a detailed account of the experiences of nine female doctoral students through an analysis of their personal narratives. Unfortunately, the narratives of the women who participated in this study suggest that they did not feel adequately supported academically, professionally, or personally in their doctoral programs.

Participants and Methods

Nine female doctoral students, attending two large, midwestern, public universities, volunteered to share their personal narratives for this qualitative study. They were working toward doctorates in a variety of fields and were at various stages in their programs. First year students included: *Deena* (Creative Writing, 31 years old, married, raised in New York, Euro-American), *Kristine* (History, 26 years old, single, raised in Ohio, Euro-American), and *Constance* (History, 50 years old, divorced, raised in Missouri, Euro-American). *Catherine* (27 years old,

single, raised in Ohio, Euro-American) and *Mary Beth* (50 years old, divorced, raised in Ohio, Euro-American) were second and third year English majors, completing coursework and preparing for their comprehensive examinations. *Deborah* (English, 44 years old, divorced, raised in Ohio, Euro-American) and *Belgin* (Political Science, 30 years old, married, international student Turkey) were fourth and fifth year students writing their dissertations. *Marie* (English, 34 years old, married, raised in Ohio, Italian-American) and *Lynn* (Cello Performance, 33 years old, single, international student from China) had recently completed their degrees and were preparing to begin their first, full-time university teaching positions.

Personal narratives served as the primary source of data for this study (Heilbrun, 1988; Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Wear, 1993). Each woman participated in either two or three interviews of approximately one and one-half hours each. Each interview was tape-recorded and completely transcribed. Analysis of their narratives was based in grounded theory procedures (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Educational Advocates and Barriers

Although the women spoke at much greater length about the educational barriers they had faced and their "responses" to these barriers, they did acknowledge their "educational advocates," that is individuals who supported their educational and career goals. One type of advocate was an "original influence" who initiated interest in a specific field of study. Usually this individual was a high school teacher or undergraduate professor. Friends, colleagues, family members, and teachers who recognized and encouraged the women's academic abilities also served as advocates. Several women (Deena, Mary Beth, Marie, and Kristine) mentioned a third type of advocate, a mentor, who provided long-term guidance by supporting their academic interests and serving as a role model for their academic and personal lives.

As stated previously, all the women were thankful to have had educational advocates but they devoted the majority of their personal narratives to describing the barriers (including cultural, status, and gender) they experienced during their doctoral studies.

Cultural Barriers

The first barrier, cultural, occurred when the belief system or practices of a country or institution limited the women's educational and professional pursuits. For instance, both Belgin and Lynn felt that their homelands presented cultural barriers

to their success. Belgin recalled a conversation with a friend's father when she was 13 years old who held a common belief that Turkish women should limit their education.

> We were talking one day and he said, "Well I don't want my daughter to have a difficult job because you know, she will get married one day and have kids and I don't want her to get tired or whatever."

Similarly, Lynn described how living in China would have limited her educational and professional growth.

> ...here you talk about rights....In China, not everybody has a right. Men, grown men, they have rights. Kids, no rights. Women, less. When I was graduating from college [in China] with straight A's and then auditioning for an orchestra...The assistant principle cello, his son, did not get into a college. He was auditioning at the same time....Do you know what he said?....He said, now symphony orchestras, their level is not as good as before just because of all these women players joining in. Now they even advertise for some things only male....[In the United States] I've not felt anything against me because I am a woman. But in China yes, a lot....You are not expected to speak out your own thoughts. If you do, people will think you are bitchy, aggressive....A woman should be obedient, soft, you know, just without your own mind....Of course, I was not that way.

Possibly due to her experiences in China, Lynn felt that she was receiving an education equal to her male colleagues in the United States. On the other hand, Kristine felt that differential treatment of men and women existed. Mary Beth identified this occurrence as the "glass ceiling," meaning that there were invisible—yet very real—barriers for women in higher education. She also felt that barriers existed for female faculty—as well as female students—and commented that the female professors in her department were not as supportive as they could have been.

> I think the place where I'm bothered the most by the invisibility of women is the women professors are kind of scarce and the ones that we do have tend to keep a low profile. Now whether or not that's because it just happens, or it's a survival technique, or they're naturally quiet and retiring, I don't know.

Status Barriers

A second educational barrier that six women experienced was status. This occurred when an individual with a recognized higher status (such as a professor)

interfered with a woman's educational pursuits. For example, Deena had professors who attempted to discourage her from becoming a writer by criticizing her abilities. While applying to her undergraduate college, Deena sent a professor samples of her poetry. His response was, "I had nothing going for me but my name." Her abilities were challenged a second time in New York when the chairman of her English department attempted to intimidate her during her master's defense. He

> ...felt that I was a creative writer and not quite an intellectual. And he did not want me to get the degree. And he asked all sorts of questions in my defense that I had no understanding what the question was. So I just, I just said, "I don't know what you're asking. What are you asking?" And he was like, "You should understand what I'm asking." "But I just don't." So somehow I passed, and because the other two answered the questions for me.

Lynn experienced a similar situation when several professors would not help her and her colleagues prepare for their doctoral qualifying examinations. So Lynn

> ...talked to one of the faculty. I said, "Our classes, they are not preparing us for the exams." And they said, "Well they're not supposed to." I said, "They aren't supposed to?" And he said, "Yeah. You're a doctoral student. You're expected to study a lot on your own"....I did complain. I did. It [the preparation] was very hard.

In addition to professors directly impeding the educational pursuits of female doctoral students, barriers were also created indirectly when professors vied with one another for status. Mary Beth has a friend who had

> ... finished all of her [doctoral] coursework...and discovered that she couldn't do the work that she wanted to do because the two people [male professors] who could direct [her areas of interest] hated each other so much that they wouldn't be on her committee....She doesn't know exactly what to do....this is unfortunate that professors can refuse to work with each other and prevent a student from doing the work she wants to do.

Similarly, Catherine said that male doctoral students created barriers for female doctoral students by being overly aggressive during group discussions.

> You are in a circle, trying to have a discussion group, and the men are talking over the women, and the women are sitting there politely with their hand raised, not saying anything. And in fact, I just witnessed that in the class I was just in where there were two women with their hands up. And the teacher was sitting on one end, and the male student was sitting here so he could see that these two women had their hands up. And this professor happens to speak

> very slowly so it's just this grueling moment....And the male student, again, he saw these women with their hands up and as soon as the professor took a pause, he said something.

Catherine also saw male graduate students create educational barriers for female doctoral students through personal relationships. She explained that when male and female doctoral students in her department became romantically involved, and later separated, the end result was a power struggle with the male student humiliating the female student in class.

> The male students really don't have a hard time forgetting about it [the breakup] and they can go into a class and make fun of the female student and roll their eyes at her whenever she talks and they can still perform at their level but she's so flustered that she can't do anything and ends up sacrificing her performance in class.

Likewise, Ruth commented on differences in the ways male and female doctoral students conducted themselves in class. However, rather than consciously attempting to increase their power, Ruth felt that

> male graduate students seem to me to have more self-confidence and they're more aggressive and they're more adversarial. They're more willing to disagree with professors than women are. I guess, they seem to take themselves more seriously as graduate students and teaching assistants. I guess they're sort of more professional....But most of the guys I think feel the need to be in control and on top of their graduate studies.

In addition to male professors and doctoral students, female professors created educational barriers for female doctoral students. In Washington, Deena had a female professor in her master's degree tried to discourage her from applying for a grant. Apparently, she wanted to use her status to control Deena's access to her "territory."

> I'd been working with this one semi-famous woman and she had always been very encouraging and really nice and whatever and only said great things and whatever....after the [master's] defense I said..."I'm going to apply for an NEA and you know my work better than anyone here." And I had heard that she had won one before, so I said, "Maybe you would be able to advise me"...She just gave me this look of, "You've gotta be kidding" because she herself was applying that year. And she said, "Can you even apply?" And I said, "Well yeah, you have to publish twenty poems in the last five years or so. I can apply." She said, "Really. Well, ah, I'm not saying you shouldn't bother but it's

> really, odds are not in your favor." So...I believed her. What the hell do I know. So I went home and told [my husband], and said I shouldn't even apply because [she] thinks I'm not gonna have a chance. And he got furious. He said, "What the fuck does she know?" So, we applied and I then I got one and she didn't....But I think that it was sort of eye-opening that you know, for some teachers, if you don't tread on their territory they prefer you and what are you there for?

The women also reported that female professors using their status to control female teaching assistants. Kristine had just resolved a situation in which the female professor for whom she worked consistently blamed her for her own mistakes. Like Deena, Kristine had initially had a supportive relationship with this professor. And, Catherine described a situation in which a female professor ordered her female teaching assistant to clean her house.

Gender Barriers

Gender was a third educational barrier six of the women in this study described. For instance, Mary Beth said that her male professors did not take her seriously because she was an older, female doctoral student. And, Constance encountered sexism and racism when she

> ...went into one of my graduate classes and there was a student in there, a male student, who I went on break with, who I never met before, I asked him what he was doing and he said, "Well, right now I'm just a graduate student but I'm going to get that job that you probably saw posted on the board...for the Historical Society." And I said, "Oh really?" I said, "How do you know you're going to get it?" And he said, "Oh, I do a lot of volunteer work over there and they told me the job is mine." I said, "Oh that's wonderful!" I said, "That is really great." And he looked at me straight in the eye, he was a young man, I'd say in his late twenties, he said, "I hope you don't take this the wrong way, but" he said, "the job is mine if no minorities apply for it....the next time you go over there you check. For every man there are seven women." I left there that evening and thought, "You SOB....Guess what? I'm taking that job away from you!"...So, I did...I actually went and applied and got the job.

Interestingly, female professors also presented gender barriers to these women through their sexist comments. Marie said that

> ...not to me but to someone else, one of the people [female professors] on my committee actually complained that, "You know, these female graduate

> students go off, they get married, and then they give up. They don't get anything done."

Marie admitted that she did not complete much work on her dissertation during her wedding preparations. However, she explained that married women have a more difficult time completing their programs due to "traditional" expectations.

> It's not so much that the women students are innately incapable of balancing everything. I think it's because still, the larger bulk of the childcare responsibilities and the housework and all that stuff still falls primarily on the female regardless of whether she has another job outside the home....therefore women graduate students are sort of unfairly perceived as giving up when they get married or whatever....men think they're doing more, and maybe they're doing more than their fathers did, but they're certainly not doing their equal share.

Additionally, Marie felt that because she and her female doctoral colleagues pursued feminist topics, they experienced more resistance than their male colleagues from both male and female professors.

> It seems that...women felt that they were being sort of questioned and their areas were being questioned more closely and meeting more objections than men. And we said that maybe it's because a lot of the female students are doing what is called quote, unquote, non-traditional and really emphasizing the feminism. It seems that the female professors who have been here a long time you know, were dismissing all this ethnic stuff as a trend du jour and [implying], "You know you really shouldn't be focusing your energy just to please the job market because the trend will pass."

Marie also noted explained how being female excluded her and her female doctoral colleagues from the informal professional networking between the male professors and male doctoral students in her department. She admitted that women were not actively excluded, but neither were they actively included.

> I don't think the department is inherently sexist or anything like that. But it seems to me, and this occurred to other female students as well, that there were things in place in the program that really were geared to ensure the better success of the male students. And I'm not talking about anything formal or institutionalized....there was, I used to call it the "jock-ocracy". A group of professors played basketball together and the male graduate students were just sort of magically included in this. And again, not that I think if one of us women students wanted to play they would have actively kept us out. But I

> suspect that one, we would not have been very welcome....So I dubbed it the "jock-ocracy" because you know, the male graduate students were making these informal social connections with professors that we didn't have access to....And there wasn't anything else similar in place that the women professors were doing.

Most of the gender barriers mentioned thus far were initiated by individuals who held the same—or higher—status as the female doctoral students. However, Mary Beth felt that her male undergraduate students presented barriers by challenging her status as a female instructor and trying to "dominate" the class.

> I personally have had some trouble, not a huge amount, in classrooms dealing with male students who tend to want to dominate the classroom and write the rules. And I am sure that would not occur with a male professor...And also they dominate over the classroom in general. But they try to take control of the classroom....I think the worst experience I had with a classroom situation was when I was teaching at [a branch college of the university] and it was really, I was substituting for another teacher and she didn't tell me but I suspect she had trouble with that class too. But there were some truly aggressive guys in that class.

Sexualization was another gender barrier these women experienced, ranging from inappropriate attention to sexual imposition. For instance, during a meeting with a professor, Catherine felt that he was more interested in her chest than the subject of their meeting.

> Do the male professors know that if I've just gone through a conference with him in his office and he stared at my chest the whole time that I'm going to go back into the TA office and say, "So and so just copped a look at my chest." Do they know, do they realize? I don't know.

Catherine noted that sexualization of female students was recreated at a lower level when male doctoral teaching assistants objectified the female undergraduate students they taught.

> I remember one guy [male teaching assistant] said...that a female student came to talk to him in his office and he said that there was this sexual tension between the two of them. And finally he said to her, "Well maybe you better leave." And all I could think was maybe she wasn't feeling that. What if that was all him and all she really wanted was some help? And here you are sexualizing this, making her uncomfortable, and then refusing to help her.

Catherine also discussed how the sexualization of women was perpetuated by some English teaching methods.

> Sexual politics, it's studied a lot in English too. I remember reading that you can use sexual tension in your class to the advantage of your class. And again, all the male graduate students thought "Yea. Why not?" And all the female students are going, "What? Are you crazy? Open up that can of worms in the middle of your classroom? Use my body in order to get my students to pay attention? No way. No way." And one [male student] even said, "Well there's always going to be sexual tension."

The most blatant gender barrier for these women was sexual imposition by male professors. Deena described the sexual impositions of a male professor in her master's program and how he attempted use his status to control her.

> I guess I felt lucky that I was sort of jaded enough that when professors, well this happened as a undergrad too, professors would harass me or whatever, I could sort of jokingly joke it off. And at [New York] that one professor was pretty adamant. He would show up at my house and he was on my committee so I didn't want to get him angry at me....And the funny thing is...[a] fiction writer had died that week and he showed up at my house and he said you have to have sex with me because [this writer] died and I'm feeling pretty bad....He ended up getting almost fired. He was suspended for two years. He just did this to everybody, indiscriminately, probably all the women that were, whatever.

Sexual imposition was initiated not only by male professors to female doctoral students, but also by male undergraduate students to female teaching assistants. Catherine said:

> The heck with this Indecent Proposal stuff from women to subordinate males.....I really think that most of the sexual harassment that goes on in the university is toward, not female professors, but toward female TAs and adjuncts, you know?...I had a student expose himself to me which was pretty vile. But in fact, one of my girlfriends last quarter had to kick a student out of her class for sexually harassing her....There was one student who last year, this was to his female TA, he basically wrote a rape fantasy in his journal about her and it started out, "I wonder what my teacher's going to be doing tonight. Wouldn't it be great if we met in a bar and I, and then I, and then I..."

Responses

Although these women confronted many barriers while pursuing their doctoral education, they did not simply accept their fate. They worked to counteract these barriers by implementing "responses." These responses included: (1) resistance; (2) creating a supportive environment, and; (3) stressing the importance of education.

Resistance

One response, resistance, was expressed by avoidance, confrontation, and perseverance. One woman who used avoidance was Catherine. Earlier, Catherine described the power struggles that took place between romantically involved male and female doctoral colleagues in her department. Rather than put herself at risk of becoming part of these struggles, Catherine said she avoided those situations "at all costs." And because she wanted to teach at a small, liberal arts college, Catherine also avoided situations that would identify her as a "researcher," such working as a research assistant.

> I'm being encouraged to apply for some fellowships. But, I'm not going to do it because I've already lost one year of teaching with this research assistantship and I'm afraid if I lose another year of teaching that....the liberal arts colleges are going to look at me and think, "We don't want you [because you're a researcher]"... and I'm really weary of that kind of--that socialization that's happening around....I'm not going to let my advisor and graduate directors push me in this direction and shape me in that way.

Lynn used avoidance to resist cultural barriers. Rather than live in China where she was not able to pursue her goal of being a "well-educated cello player," she came to the United States. Although she avoided the "external" barriers of her homeland, she still encountered "internal" barriers.

> Today I'm still struggling with this [what I was taught when I was younger]..."everyone else is doing better than you are. You're stupid. You're no good. You're worthless.....Probably we [as women] are too weak. Just go and get married, to be expected wife and mother"....[But] I'm not going to stop [pursuing my goals] until I think there is no where to go.

A second type of resistance the women used was confrontation. For example, when Kristine felt her female professor was taking advantage of her as a teaching assistant, she discussed the situation with her. Similarly, she confronted a friend who included her on his e-mail distribution list for sexist jokes after she requested to be removed. Additionally, Lynn confronted her professor regarding the lack of

preparation she and her doctoral colleagues received for their qualifying examinations. Unfortunately, none of these women felt they received satisfactory responses from those individuals they confronted.

The women in this study also resisted by refusing to allow individuals interfere with their educational goals. Deena was especially "stubborn." As mentioned earlier, Deena had a college professor tell her she had nothing going for her as a poet but her name. However, she continued to pursue writing and even received her undergraduate degree from the college at which he taught. Similarly, she refused to become discouraged during her master's defense in New York, or when a female professor in Washington discouraged her from applying for an NEA grant.

Likewise, Marie continued to work on her dissertation, even though her progress slowed during her wedding preparations. She worked even harder when a female professor commented that women doctoral students who marry during their programs never finish. She said that the professor's comment, "kind of ticked me off, because you know--I felt, 'Well, I'm going to do this just to show her.'"

Creating a Supportive Environment

A second way these women responded to their educational barriers was by creating a supportive environment. For instance, Mary Beth worked to create "collegiality" and support within her department through her involvement in the English Graduate Organization (EGO). This organization raised money to purchase journals for the department that the university library did not own, and convinced members of the English department to purchase computers for the teaching assistants. Similarly, Marie tried to generate support for the interests of her and her female colleagues by identifying student interest for a Women's Literature course. Unfortunately, there was little faculty support.

> I surveyed other graduate students. I said if we try to get a course together on American Women's Lit, will people be interested. Oh yeah. So I asked several different professors if they would teach a course. And either because they were already loaded down or they were going to be on sabbatical, the ones who would have been appropriate to do it couldn't do it.

Participating in "women-only spaces" was another way women created supportive environments. Kristine participated in an e-mail women's history list which provided a support system and discussion forum for women historians. She described one of their recent exchanges.

> ...a discussion came up the other day: "I'm thinking of having a child. When would you recommend it--before I start my dissertation, while I'm doing my dissertation, afterwards, or hold off?" And this conversation, and we're talking there are so many historians on this line, like very well-known women. It went on for a week with tons of people chiming in before someone said, "I can't believe this discussion has been going on for so long and no one has brought up the husband. What is the husband's role?"...not that those concerns are alien to men, but...I think it's important to have this female space with other women.

Kristine also started a group for women historians within her department to provide support within their predominantly male department.

> ...one day we went out for coffee and [a new colleague asked if we had] a women's reading group....No, but sounds fabulous and I've always wanted to have one and let's start one. So I talked to some of the women in our department because you know, I wanted to get some feedback before I did this....And most of the women, the people when I first mentioned it to them said that is a great idea. You know, why hadn't we done it sooner. And so we had our first one last night and it was really, really good....And it worked out well.

Constance and several other female doctoral students were planning to create a similar space by renting a house together.

> But a group of us are looking for a house for next year....living in a house with grad students who are taking the same courses and are able to nurture each other or say, "I've got three pages here. Does this make sense to you?" would be wonderful.

Stressing the Importance of Education

A final response of seven women was to stress the importance of education to the students they taught. This response was both a reaction against the educational barriers they had experienced, as well as a re-creation of their advocate's support. The women expressed their belief in education in two ways. One way was by helping students "connect" to the course material. They believed that if the students felt a connection, they would enjoy the course and gain an appreciation for the subject and learning. Mary Beth hoped to create this connection through a new literature anthology she chose for her class.

> It's an anthology that's thematically-based and all the work in it centers around a theme of relationships....And one of the things I like best about it is

> that it includes work from many different cultures, but many of the English classics, basic stories, and poems, and things....What this text has done is, has made literature more accessible to the average kid. It is no longer just a monument that they somehow have to access. It's about real people. It's about people you might know. It might be you!

Constance also wanted to help students connect to history, which she believed was most easily accomplished through her specialty of Twentieth-Century History.

> I love this time period so bad!....Twentieth-Century [American History], there is just so much you can do with it. It's wonderful. And what's cool about that time period is whoever we're learning about, you can look back and say, "Oh my God. My grandfather lived during that period." "Oh my dad served in Vietnam." "Oh I remember when Reagan was president." So it's still easy to bring it alive to these people as opposed to saying, "Well, let's look at the Puritans."

Similarly, Kristine wanted to help her history students find their niche in history as her undergraduate teacher did for her with women's history. She felt this was especially important for students in "marginalized groups."

> And I think it's true for all sorts of marginalized groups like Black History, Gay History, Indian History, I mean there are tons of sub-fields out there now and I think it's important because if you don't find your niche [in a field], you're not going to appreciate it.

Finally, Belgin said that when she returned to Turkey, she would use a comparative approach, similar to her teachers in the United States, in order to help students understand Turkey's "problems," and consequently the field of Political Science.

If their students did not find a connection to the course material, the women stressed the importance of education by emphasizing its practical importance in life. Catherine said that with her students

> ...we talk a lot about what the purpose of the class is, why does the university think it's important for you to have three terms of English and one of those terms is literature and the other term is argument....And as they start thinking about this, saying oh yeah. Even though I am going to be a police officer, you do have to write reports every day. Or even though I'm going to be a ballet dancer, I'm going to be sending, at least sending out resumes and cover letters and I need to know writing.

Although Mary Beth also acknowledged the importance of education in getting a job, she felt that it was more important for students to learn for pleasure rather than to just make money.

> And you know, the job market being what it is, in my field it's horrible but it doesn't matter. Yes, I need to support myself but I would do this [my doctorate] anyway just because I want to. And that's what I'd love to pass on to my students. I would love to pass on that--passionate devotion to learning but also that it's OK and really commendable just because you like it and not because it's practical....I wish that I could convince more of them to choose a career because it's what they like to do rather than because they're going to make some money.

Marie stressed the vocational importance of education, but she resented justifying the importance of English or a liberal education to her students and anyone else.

> I find the students now are very utilitarian in their ideas about education. And if you can't prove to them that this class, taking freshman comp is going to help me, because I have, well, I'm an engineer. Why do I have to learn how to write? Well, so I have to come up with well, "You're going to have to be writing reports. You're going to have to be communicating with other people on projects so you have to be able to use language," and they usually say, "OK. I guess you're right." But on another level it really irks me to have to justify what I'm doing in terms of money and practicality. There's something about that and maybe again it's my "ivory towerism" coming out.

Several women stressed the importance of education as a "tool" for implementing societal change. Kristine believed that by educating students about unequal power relations, they would be less likely to participate in—or recreate—them.

> I still think education is incredibly important. If for nothing else, and I think this is probably new too, strengthening the whole view that people will be ignorant without education, especially in terms of like you know, power relations and such things you know, racism, sexism, what not. I definitely see education as something that fundamentally has to change [people]. It has to be one of the tools to get people to change. So in that sense, I very much value education.

Like Kristine, Catherine believed in social reconstruction through education. Although Catherine was still "investigating" how to implement democracy and critical thinking in the classroom, she knew what she wanted the end result to be.

> I really believe strongly in you know, democracy...democracy in the classroom....What I believe I mean is that I'm trying to help my students and encourage them to think...to learn critical thinking skills and then apply them to not just what they're doing when they're in the classroom or when they're studying <u>but</u> when they're listening to Pat Buchanan speak or when they see a billboard at the side of the road--to look at those propaganda and these cultural messages and to evaluate them.

Mary Beth shared a teaching agenda similar to Catherine's, and wanted to teach her students to think independently while developing an appreciation for literature.

> I have many, many students who have never read a novel....It is scary....And some people think that by seeing the movie or the television show they have done their part. But what they have done is given a captive interpretation over to the Hollywood types with their corporate sponsors who—all of them—are writing from an agenda that has nothing to do with the good of the consumer or the propagation of culture, and that is particularly scary because those are the people who will be voting.

Although many women believed in the potential of education for social change, they acknowledged that higher education often perpetuates the conditions that discourage change. Kristine struggled with how her "objective" education was not objective and actually separating her from the individuals she wanted to help.

> [In graduate school,] you're also kind of secluding yourself from the rest of the world. When you become an academic you can think lofty thoughts, and you can write your books that only other academics read, and I think it becomes a huge struggle with me as to what is scholarly, who does it benefit, and what good are you doing for society.

Like Kristine, Catherine acknowledged that universities and English programs separate people and foster elitism by promoting academic writing. Ironically, Catherine admitted she entered graduate school with anticipation of becoming part of the academic elite. Constance described the elitist attitudes in history and how academic historians belittled public historians. Although she was an academic historian, she believed all levels of teaching were important and wanted to equally capture the interest of her peers, the public, and the students she taught.

Deena identified elitism within universities in terms of the emphasis on literary theory, mandatory reading lists, and cultural literacy. She felt cultural literacy limited—rather than broadened—thought.

> I think it [critical literacy] makes people all the same...rather than saying, "Have you read South African this and that," people've all read the same American British stuff, and--hello! There are other things being published. So I don't think that [cultural literacy] necessarily fosters good writing or even good thinking after a while. It's all sort of uniform.

Conclusion

Each of the nine female doctoral students in this study entered their doctoral programs with the same goals: to increase their knowledge in their fields through coursework and interactions with professors and colleagues, to pass their doctoral examinations, to complete their dissertations, and to be hired by colleges or universities where their knowledge and teaching expertise would be appreciated. However, at times, the reality of doctoral study did not meet their expectations. Almost every woman spoke of the "different forces for men and women in doctoral work," the "glass ceiling," women professors keeping a "low profile," the lack of assistance from professors at crucial times in their programs (specifically, doctoral examinations and dissertation), male colleagues dominating class discussions, professors not taking female doctoral students' interests and abilities seriously, being excluded from networking, and being sexualized by professors, colleagues, and the students they taught.

Similar to other feminist analyses of women in higher education in the United States (such as Holland and Eisenhart, 1990) it appears that the women in this study were also socialized to accommodate the sexist practices of the university, even those which negatively affected their educational lives and pursuits. The women in this study wanted to succeed in their programs and in order to do so, focused all their energy on doing well under adverse conditions. Rarely did they challenge practices within their departments and demand the respect they deserved, possibly because they did not feel adequately supported. Consequently, the women were left with no choice but to ignore the barriers they faced and accommodate their educational goals to their departments' expectations of them.

These barriers also forced the women in this study to accommodate their beliefs in their abilities. Many (including Deena, Kristine, Constance, Ruth, Mary Beth) downplayed their ability to learn theoretical material and believed they

probably would not find jobs because of the many other "more qualified" job candidates. Catherine wondered about how she would survive in a university and said she would rather work in a museum than submit herself to the pressures higher education exerts on women. This decision was possibly due to one of her female professors attempting suicide several times due to job pressures. Marie almost abandoned pursuing university teaching when she could not find an in-state job and did not feel she could ask her husband to leave his job if she were hired out-of-state. (However, at the same time, she had been frustrated by professors' comments about female doctoral students giving up their careers after they married.) Luckily, she was hired by a local university.

Only Belgin and Lynn—who experienced greater barriers to their education outside of the United States—spoke with confidence that they would be hired in the positions for which they had prepared. However, like Catherine, Belgin described how higher education had changed some of her female professors in Turkey from being caring professors to individuals with "personality deficiencies." And, Lynn said that she never considered marriage during her doctoral studies because she did not want to compromise her career goals like many of her female colleagues. (However, she also recognized that her male doctoral students compromised nothing when they married her female colleagues.)

Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) have studied women in academia and the reasons why the majority who enter academic careers "deflect" and never gain the full "professional authority" of their male colleagues. They believe it is partly because female doctoral students and female academics do not have role models and must "fashion new roles and identities, and thereby to create new norms for themselves and for their work" (p. 18).

Three female doctoral students—Carroll, Carse, and Trefzer (1993)—have written about the marginalization of academic women and the process of identity creation. In their essay entitled, Fashioning Professional Selves, they state that:

> We graduate students are now serving apprenticeships for selves of the future—possessors of PhDs, professors, professional. Few of us, however, need more than our first-year experience to realize how little of our current selves the academic institution allows to participate in the fashioning of those future selves (p. 63).

And as the personal narratives of the women in this study have illustrated, Carroll, Carse, and Trefzer (1993) stated that:

> Women's struggle for scholarly and pedagogical self-definition—a definition predicated on neither the model of self-creation adopted by male counterpoints nor that predetermined for women by patriarchy—is a constant search for identity and a complex act of self-dramatization (p. 76).

The barriers that the women in this study experienced is made even more startling by placing men in their positions. How many male students have felt sexually threatened by their professors? How many men have been discouraged from studying the lives and works of men in music, art, literature, science, or history, or have been told that they will probably not finish their degree because they married?

Changes must occur in higher education in order to create an environment that supports women at all levels: as undergraduate students, as graduate students, and as faculty. But who will initiate and support these changes? Carroll, Carse, and Trefzer (1993) question the power of female doctoral students to transform the university when higher education already marginalizes their existence.

> How can we hope to participate in the transformation of the profession—certainly a primary goal of feminists in the academe—when we are ourselves in the process of transformation, struggling to create professional selves in an institution that marginalizes us while dictating the shape of those future selves? (p. 64).

If female doctoral students are unable to transform the university, who will? One might look to female professors and administrators in higher education. However, based on the personal narratives of the women in this study, it appears that many women who do not "deflect" from their academic careers tend to perpetuate the inequalities and barriers that they undoubtedly experienced as doctoral students.

Is it possible for those involved in higher education to identify the barriers that still exist for women and work to eliminate them? Even as a feminist researcher, I found it very difficult to acknowledge the accommodations the women in this study were making in their lives. Undoubtedly, I also have been socialized to accommodate my goals to fit the expectations of higher education rather than to believe that I have the right and power to successfully challenge those who place barriers in my path. It is my hope that this study will provide an impetus for change by graphically illustrating the differential treatment that many women experience in higher education, but also give strength to those women experiencing barriers in doctoral study by showing that they are not alone.

Reference List

Aisenberg, N. & Harrington, M. (1988). Women of academe: Outsiders in the sacred grove. Amherst, Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Baird, L. (1992). The stages of the doctoral career: Socialization and its consequences (Report No. HE 025 762). San Francisco: American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 348 925)

Carroll, S., Carse, W., & Trefzer, A. (1993). Fashioning professional selves. Critical Matrix: The Princeton Journal of Women, Gender, & Culture, 7 (1), 63-79.

Deegan, M. J. & Hill, M. R. (1991). Doctoral dissertations as liminal journeys on the self: Betwixt and between in graduate sociology programs. Teaching Sociology, 19, 322-332.

Dublon, F. J. (1983). Women doctoral students in higher education administration: Life-style aspiration and multiple role commitments. Journal of the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors, 47 (1), 20-25.

Heilbrun, C. G. (1988). Writing a woman's life. New York: Ballantine Books.

Holland, D. C. & Eisenhart, M. A. (1990). Educated in romance: Women, achievement, and college culture. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Holmstrom, E. I. & Holmstrom, R. W. (1974). The plight of the woman doctoral student. American Educational Research Journal, 11 (1), 1-17.

Katz, J. & Hartnett, R. T. (Eds.). (1976). Scholars in the making: The development of graduate and professional students. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Company.

Madrey, F. G. (1983). The effects of enrollment on full-time, married doctoral students: An ethnographic study (Report No. HE 016 469). Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Higher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 232 548)

Magner, D. (1997, November 21). The number of minority Ph.D.'s reached an all-time high in 1996. The Chronicle of Higher Education, pp. A10-A11.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (1995). Designing qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Personal Narratives Group (Ed.) (1989). Interpreting women's lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Peters, D. S. & Peterson, M. (1987). Rites of passage for doctoral students in higher education (Report No. 021 252). Baltimore, MD: Association for the Study of Higher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 292 388)

Prince, J. L. (1991). The impact of social support on the educational experience and career development of women graduates of an educational doctoral program. [CD-ROM]. Dissertation Abstracts International, 52(06), 2029A. Abstract from: Dissertation Abstracts: Dissertation Abstracts Item: 9133652

Rosenberg, R. (1988). The limits of access: The history of coeducation in America. In J. M. Faragher & F. Howe (eds.) Women in higher education in American History: Essays from the Mount Holyoak College Sesquicentennial Symposia (pp. 107-129). New York: W. W. Norton.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques. Newbury Park: SAGE Publications.

Stryker, E., Twohey, D., & Halderson, C. (1985). What's a nice girl like me doing in a doctoral program? Reinterpreting our life experiences (Report No. CG 019 153). Kalamazoo, MI: Annual Woman Researcher Conference. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 270 696)

Valdez, R. (1982). First year doctoral students and stress. College Student Journal, 16, 30-37.

Vartuli, S. (Ed.) (1982). The Ph.D. experience: A woman's point of view. New York: Praeger.

Wear, D. (1993). Center of the web: Women and solitude. Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Wright, J. & Lodwick, R. (1989). The process of the Ph.D.: A study of the first year of doctoral study. Research Papers in Education, 4 (1), 22-56.